

DOCUMENTING CONTINUING COMPETENCY

NEW SECTION

WAC 246-840-201 Continuing competency purpose statement. Patients, families, and communities expect safe, competent, and compassionate nursing care. These rules establish a self-directed continuing competency program that includes participation in active practice, self-assessment and reflection, and continuing education for registered nurses and licensed practical nurses, as a mechanism to help keep patients safe and improve nursing practice.

NEW SECTION

WAC 246-840-202 Continuing competency definitions. The definitions in this section apply throughout WAC 246-840-201 through 246-840-207 unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) **Active nursing practice** means engagement in paid, unpaid, or volunteer activity performing acts requiring a nursing license as described in RCW 18.79.040, 18.79.050, or 18.79.060. Active nursing practice may include working as a nursing administrator, nursing quality manager, nursing policy officer, public health nurse, parish nurse, home health nurse, nursing educator, nursing consultant, nursing regulator or any practice requiring nursing knowledge and a nursing license.

(2) **Attestation** means the affirmation by signature of the nurse indicating compliance with the standards and terms of the continuing competency requirements.

(3) **Compliance** means adherence to and fulfillment of the requirements of relevant laws and regulations.

(4) **Compliance audit** is a review of documents to determine fulfillment of requirements. A continuing competency compliance audit requires a nurse to submit documents demonstrating five hundred thirty-one hours of active nursing practice and forty-five hours of continuing nursing education over a three-year review period.

(5) **Continuing competency** is the ongoing ability of a nurse to maintain, update and demonstrate sufficient knowledge, skills, judgment, and qualifications necessary to practice safely and

ethically in a designated role and setting in accordance with the scope of nursing practice. A nurse achieves continuing competency through active practice, self-assessment and reflection, and continuing nursing education.

(6) **Continuing nursing education** refers to systematic professional learning experiences obtained after initial licensure designed to augment the knowledge, skills, and judgment of nurses and enrich nurses' contributions to quality health care and their pursuit of professional career goals. The education hours should relate to the nurse's area of professional practice or areas identified through self-assessment and reflection for professional growth and development. There are various types of continuing education activities. Some involve participant attendance where the pace of the activity is determined by the provider who plans and schedules the activity. Others are designed for completion by the learner, independently, at the learner's own pace and at a time of the learner's choice. Continuing nursing education hours may be obtained through mentorship, certification, presentations, and specialty certification.

(7) **Inactive practice** means less than five hundred thirty-one hours of active nursing practice in a three-year review period.

(8) **Nursing practice** means the performance of acts requiring substantial specialized nursing knowledge, judgment, and skills described under RCW 18.79.040, 18.79.050, and 18.79.060. For purposes of the continuing competency requirements, the commission recognizes "nursing practice" as being performance in either a paid or unpaid position requiring a nursing license.

(9) **Review period** is three full licensing renewal cycles. For purposes of a compliance audit, the review period will be the three years preceding the audit form due date.

(10) **Self-assessment and reflection** means the process of the nurse assessing their active nursing practice to determine strengths and opportunities for new learning. The purpose of this process is for the nurse to assess and reflect on:

(a) Making patient safety a priority;

(b) Familiarity with current laws and rules related to nursing practice; and

(c) Existing knowledge and skills (e.g., infection prevention techniques, open communication, and clinical competency). Nurses complete the self-assessment and reflection process when selecting education and training opportunities in their nursing careers.

(11) **Technical assistance** means help provided by commission members or staff based on the needs of the nurse to comply with rules and regulations.

(12) **Unpaid practice** means providing uncompensated services considered within the scope and domain of the nursing profession. Examples of unpaid practice include: A nurse volunteering time to a church such as a parish nurse or a nurse volunteering nursing services at a community clinic. There is a wide range of opportunities within the nursing profession to participate in unpaid service to the community.

NEW SECTION

WAC 246-840-203 Continuing competency requirements--Active status. (1) Continuing competency applies to registered nurses and practical nurses licensed in Washington state who hold an active license. To renew an active license a registered nurse or a practical nurse must complete the following continuing competency requirements every three years:

(a) Document compliance with the continuing competency requirements every three years. Beginning January 1, 2014, and every three years thereafter, each nurse must sign an attestation on a form provided by the department of health declaring completion of the required active nursing practice and continuing nursing education hours. Each nurse will have a full three years to meet the requirements. The review period begins on the first birth date after receiving the initial license.

(i) A minimum of five hundred thirty-one hours must be in active nursing practice, which may include working as a nursing administrator, nursing quality manager, nursing policy officer, public health nurse, parish nurse, home health nurse, nursing educator, nursing consultant, nursing regulator or any practice requiring nursing knowledge and a nursing license.

(ii) A minimum of forty-five hours must be in continuing education.

(A) Continuing nursing education is defined as systematic professional learning experiences obtained after initial licensure designed to augment the knowledge, skills, and judgment of nurses and enrich nurses' contributions to quality health care and their pursuit of professional career goals.

(B) Continuing education hours should relate to the nurse's area of professional practice or areas identified through reflection and self-assessment for professional growth and development.

(C) Continuing education hours may be obtained through mentorship, certification, presentations, and specialty certification.

(D) Complete continuing nursing education. Each nurse must complete a minimum of forty-five hours of continuing nursing education in the previous three-year review period.

(E) There are various types of continuing nurse education activities. Some involve participant attendance where the pace of the activity is determined by the provider who plans and schedules the activity. Others are designed for completion by the learner, independently, at the learner's own pace and at a time of the learner's choice.

(F) One quarter credit equals ten to thirty hours. One semester credit equals fifteen to forty-five hours, depending on documentation from the educational institution.

(b) The hours may be accumulated in a single year or spread throughout the three-year review period.

(c) Nurses are encouraged to complete the self-assessment and reflection process when selecting education and training

opportunities. This assessment and reflection is for the nurses' own professional development and professional competence. The assessment and reflection is not submitted to the commission.

(2) Failure to complete the attestation every three years may be grounds to deny the license or place the license on expired status according to WAC 246-12-010 (11)(b) and chapter 34.05 RCW.

NEW SECTION

**WAC 246-840-204 Continuing competency requirements--
Reactivation from expired status.** (1) Beginning January, 2014, if a license has expired for three years or less, to return to active status a registered nurse or practical nurse must:

(a) Meet the requirements of WAC 246-12-040.

(b) Complete an attestation provided by the department indicating the intention to complete a minimum of one hundred seventy-seven hours of active nursing practice and fifteen hours of nursing continuing education within the first year following reactivation.

(2) A nurse renewing an expired license following a review period of less than three years will be audited at the end of the first year following reactivation and must provide documentation of completion of the one hundred seventy-seven active nursing practice hours and fifteen continuing education hours upon renewal.

(3) A license will not be renewed without completion of a refresher course as outlined in WAC 246-840-130 if the practice hours and continuing education hours required in subsection (1)(b) of this section are not completed within one year of reactivation.

(4) If a license has expired for more than three years the registered nurse or practical nurse must comply with the requirements of WAC 246-840-111 (2) or (3).

NEW SECTION

**WAC 246-840-205 Continuing competency requirements--
Reactivation from inactive status.** (1) Beginning January 1, 2014, if a license is inactive for less than three years to return to active status a registered nurse or practical nurse must:

(a) Meet the requirement of chapter 246-976 WAC, Part 4;

(b) Complete an attestation provided by the department indicating the intention to complete a minimum of one hundred seventy-seven practice hours of active nursing practice and fifteen nursing continuing education hours within the first year following reactivation.

(2) A nurse reactivating an inactive license following a period of less than three years will be audited and must provide documentation of completion of the one hundred seventy-seven active nursing practice hours and fifteen continuing education hours upon renewal.

(3) A license will not be renewed without completion of a refresher course as outlined in WAC 246-840-130 if the practice hours and continuing education hours required in subsection (1)(b) of this section are not completed within one year of reactivation.

(4) If a license has been inactive for three years or more the registered nurse or practical nurse must comply with the requirements under RCW 18.79.230 and WAC 246-840-120 (3) or (4).

NEW SECTION

WAC 246-840-206 Continuing competency audit process and compliance. (1) The commission shall audit a percentage of registered nurses and practical nurses renewing their licenses, including late renewals.

(2) The commission will send an audit form to the registered nurse or practical nurse at the address on record with the department.

(3) A registered nurse or practical nurse being audited will have thirty calendar days to complete and submit to the commission the audit form documenting five hundred thirty-one hours of active practice and forty-five hours of continuing nursing education.

(4) To document practice hours a licensed registered nurse or licensed practical nurse may provide:

(a) Verification from employers of hours worked;

(b) Pay stubs showing hours worked or end of year work hours and payment statements;

(c) Verification from an appropriate representative of the institution validating the hours by their signature;

(d) A statement including description of the practice setting, whether they were paid or unpaid, a description of duties and responsibilities and the signature of a supervisor;

(e) A log book documenting active nursing practice and the signature of a primary health care practitioner verifying the hours;

(f) Verification from an appropriate health care provider documenting the number of hours of home care for a friend or family member.

(5) To document continuing nursing education a registered nurse or a licensed practical nurse may provide:

(a) Certificates of satisfactory course completion and statement describing relevance to professional development plan goals;

(b) A current certificate from a nationally recognized

certifying body;

(c) Meeting minutes or meeting attendance rosters documenting participation in professional nursing organizations or employer-sponsored committees;

(d) A final transcript or transcript of classes documenting current progress towards an advanced degree in a field related to nursing practice;

(e) Documentation of completion of a nursing research project as the principal investigator, coinvestigator, or project director. Documentation may include summary of findings, thesis, dissertation, abstract, or granting agency summary;

(f) Publication or submission for publication a health care related article, book chapter, or other scholarly work. Documentation may include a copy of submitted/published article or book chapter and research;

(g) Presentations on a health care or health care system-related topic. Documentation may include a program brochure, agenda, course syllabi or a letter from the offering provider identifying the nurse's participation;

(h) Documentation of independent study or research. Documentation may include a list of activities and time spent on completing these activities.

NEW SECTION

WAC 246-840-207 Failure to meet continuing competency requirements. (1) A licensed registered nurse or practical nurse must comply with the continuing competency requirements in WAC 246-840-203. A nurse may place their license on inactive status as outlined in WAC 246-12-090 if the nurse does not meet the continuing competency requirements.

(2) The commission will send an audit form requesting documentation of the required continuing competency requirements to the registered nurse or practical nurse being audited at the address on record with the department.

(3) If the commission does not receive the required documentation within thirty calendar days of the commission's original request for documentation, a second request will be sent by the commission to the nurse at the address of record with the department.

(4) If the commission does not receive the required documentation within thirty calendar days following the second request, a third request will be sent to the address of record with the department. A nurse may place their license on inactive status as outlined in WAC 246-12-090 if the nurse does not meet the continuing competency requirements.

(5) If the commission does not receive the required documentation thirty calendar days following the third letter, the

commission shall place the license on inactive status.

(6) If the nurse's documentation does not match the hours in the attestation, technical assistance will be provided. Technical assistance may include providing information on the web site or at stakeholder meetings, and reviewing materials and offering assistance on the telephone.

(7) If the nurse cannot provide the required documentation, the nurse may place their license on inactive status according to WAC 246-12-090.

(8) If the nurse repeatedly fails to demonstrate continuing competency according to these rules, the nurse may be charged with unprofessional conduct under RCW 18.130.180, and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken which may include license suspension. License suspension may only occur after a hearing as provided in chapter 34.05 RCW.

(9) If a nurse is unable to provide adequate documentation the commission will place the license on inactive status thirty calendar days following the third letter.

(10) To be eligible to return to active nursing practice the nurse must provide the required documentation of active nursing practice and continuing nursing education.

(11) A nurse whose license has been placed on inactive status must comply with the requirements in WAC 246-12-040 and pay the nonrefundable renewal fee to return to active status.